

STEP Mini-Grant Frequently Asked Questions

This document lists frequently asked questions about STEP Mini-Grants. Please turn to the appropriate page number to see the corresponding answer. If you have a question that is not addressed, please contact Helen Chavez, STEP Program Specialist, at (213) 893-0505 or via email at hchavez@ceo.lacounty.gov.



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Overview Questions

Q1: Who can apply for a STEP Mini-Grant?

Answer: STEP Mini-Grants may be awarded to child development programs and licensed child care providers caring for children ages 0-5 that:

- Are located in any of the nine STEP pilot communities¹ indicated above;
- Have been licensed for at least one year; and
- Have completed a STEP application and are enrolled in STEP.

Private for-profit, non-profit, publicly subsidized programs, faith-based, school districts and any other licensed child care and early education programs are all eligible STEP applicants.

Q2: How much money will be offered by each Mini-Grant award?

Answer: STEP Mini-Grant awards will be limited to **\$5,000** per each family child care home or child development center participating in STEP. If a school district or other agency that operates several child care and/or child development centers participates in STEP, each individual center will be eligible for a Mini-Grant award up to the stated limit.

Q3: How can I use STEP Mini-Grant funds?

Answer: Mini-Grant funds may be used only to purchase items or services that improve quality in any of the six areas that the STEP rating system will assess. The six STEP Quality Areas are: 1) Regulatory Compliance; 2) Teacher/Child Relationships; 3) Learning Environment; 4) Identification and Inclusion of Children with Special Needs; 5) Staff Qualifications and Working Conditions; and 6) Family and Community Connections

Items or services purchased with STEP Mini-Grants must be directly related to any one or a combination of any of these six quality areas.

Q4: Do I need to attend a STEP Mini-Grant Workshop or Orientation Session to be eligible to participate in STEP?

Answer: No. All STEP workshops and technical assistance sessions are designed to be supportive and helpful to family child care providers and child development programs and are not mandatory. All the information needed to participate in STEP can be found in the STEP application packet, accessible via the Web at www.childcare.lacounty.gov.

¹ The nine STEP pilot communities are: Florence/Firestone, Inglewood, Long Beach, Pacoima/Arleta, Palmdale, Pasadena, Pomona, Santa Monica, and Wilmington.



Licensing Questions

Q5: I have been a licensed child care provider since January 2006. Can I participate in STEP?

Answer: Yes. Providers must be licensed for at least one year before applying to enroll in STEP. Since STEP was officially launched in July 2007, providers must hold an active license on or before July 2006.

Q6: Can I use Mini-Grant application funds to reimburse my family child care business for quality improvements that I already made?

Answer: No. While the Office of Child Care congratulates programs that have already made quality improvements, new improvements must be made by using STEP Mini-Grant funds. Review the six STEP Quality Areas and the STEP Quality Matrix to identify additional areas for improvement.

Q7: I have had an active child care license for over eight years and am now planning to move to a new residence and will need to apply for a new license. My new address will be in one of the nine STEP pilot communities. Can I participate in STEP?

Answer: To participate in STEP in its first year of implementation (July 2007 through June 2008), licensed providers that are moving to a new address must be residing in one of the nine STEP pilot communities by January 31, 2008. The Office of Child Care will require providers to submit proof of their prior license at the original address and at the new address before releasing Mini-Grant funds.

Q8: If I have not been licensed to care for children for at least one year, when will I be able to participate in STEP?

Answer: If your child care license is dated after July 1, 2006, you may submit a STEP application form during the month of your license's one-year anniversary date. For example, if your child care program was licensed in April 2007, then you may submit a STEP application in April 2008.



Mini-Grant Questions

Q9: Do quality improvements made by using STEP Mini-Grant funds need to be completed by March 1, 2008?

Answer: Yes. Only school districts and/or other large agencies that have a more time-intensive and complex approval process are exempt from this deadline. School districts and/or large agencies must agree to fully implement STEP quality improvements by May 1, 2008.

Q10: Can STEP Mini-Grant funds be used to make facility improvements, such as installing a new heater or plumbing?

Answer: No. Mini-Grant funds can only be used to purchase items or services that are directly related to any of the six areas that the STEP rating system will assess. The six STEP Quality Areas are: 1) Regulatory Compliance; 2) Teacher/Child Relationships; 3) Learning Environment; 4) Identification and Inclusion of Children with Special Needs; 5) Staff Qualifications and Working Conditions; and 6) Family and Community Connections

Facility improvements such as installing a new heater or making improvements to plumbing fixtures are not directly relevant to any of these six quality areas and are therefore not acceptable.

Q11: Can STEP Mini-Grant funds be used to buy a laptop computer for my child care business?

Answer: Yes. Mini-Grant funds can only be used to purchase items or services that are directly related to any of the six areas that the STEP rating system will assess. This item is acceptable because it can improve working conditions, and is therefore directly relevant to STEP Quality Area 5: Staff Qualifications and Working Conditions.

Q12: Can STEP Mini-Grant funds be used to buy an outdoor/backyard shade and playground equipment?

Answer: Yes. Mini-Grant funds can only be used to purchase items or services that are directly related to any of the six areas that the STEP rating system will assess. This item is acceptable because it can improve the outdoor learning environment that children play in by adding a comfortable area for shade, and is directly relevant to STEP Quality Area 3: Learning Environment.

Q13: Can I use STEP Mini-Grant funds to make improvements that relate to more than just one of the six STEP quality areas?

Answer: Yes. Items or services purchased with STEP Mini-Grants must be directly related to any one or a combination of any of these six quality areas.

Q14: Do I need to submit one or multiple budgets if I intend to purchase more than one item with STEP Mini-Grant funds?

Answer: Submit one budget that reflects each expense on a different line item. Refer to page 12 of the STEP Mini-Grant Application Guide (available at www.childcare.lacounty.gov) to see a sample STEP Mini-Grant budget.

Q15: What kind of documentation do I need to provide if I intend to purchase items online or from the Internet?

Answer: For each item that will be purchased from the Internet, include the name of the product, a description of the product, the Web site address and unit cost.

Q16: What will happen to unapproved STEP Mini-Grant applications that were submitted? Will a time extension be granted, or a second chance to make corrections?

Answer: No. Unfortunately, due to time and staffing constraints, the Office of Child Care will not be able to grant time extensions or an opportunity to correct incorrect or incomplete submissions. However, unapproved applicants will still have the option of receiving a STEP quality assessment visit, a service that is valued at approximately \$1,000 per each site visit.

Q17: Do I need to submit my STEP Application Form and the STEP Mini-Grant Application Form at the same time?

Answer: No. You may submit each one separately, but both forms must be received by the Office of Child Care by December 1, 2007.

Q18: Should I wait for my STEP Application Form to be processed before submitting my STEP Mini-Grant Application?

Answer: No. Submit both applications to the Office of Child Care in a timely manner before the deadline.

Q19: If I plan to use the STEP Mini-Grant to make a quality improvement that exceeds the \$5,000 award limit, does the budget I submit need to reflect how I am paying for the outstanding amount?

Answer: No. Do note that after issuing checks to family child care providers and/or center-based programs, the Office of Child Care will require Mini-Grant recipients to submit receipts to verify expenditures. Any unused funds will need to be returned to the Office of Child Care.



Site Visit Questions

Q20: Does the STEP quality assessment site visit need to be completed or scheduled by the May 1, 2008 deadline?

Answer: The STEP quality assessment site visit needs to be scheduled by May 1, 2008 and must be completed by June 30, 2008.

Q21: Can I schedule and receive a site visit before the May 1, 2008 deadline?

Answer: Yes. If you feel that your program is ready to receive a STEP quality assessment site visit, you will be able to schedule your site visit earlier in the year. UCLA's Center for Improving Child Care Quality has been subcontracted by the Office of Child Care to implement the quality site visits. A UCLA coordinator will be available to schedule site visits by Winter 2008.